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THE WAR PROBLEM OF THE UNITED STATES

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

BY

CHARLES RICHARD VAN HISE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

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THE WAR PROBLEM OF THE UNITED STATES

Last commencement, I reviewed the progress of the World War for the two and a half months that the United States had participated in it. The principles, then stated, for which we are fighting, remain unchanged. They have been expressed in various forms by many of the ablest men of the country, and illustrations of them have been amplified in hundreds of books and thousands of articles; but the very essence of the evil thing against which we are fighting is contained in the German doctrine that Might makes Right. We, on the contrary, with fixed determination, hold to the doctrine enunciated by Lincoln, when slavery was the issue, that Right makes Might.

A year ago, it was still true that many of the well meaning citizens of this country believed the official statement of Germany that the war was forced upon her and that she was fighting in self-defense. The terms of the treaties imposed in the East have conclusively shown her insincerity; and finally the revelations of Prince Lichnowsky have demonstrated what we were morally certain of before, that, from the first, the war was planned by Germany as one of conquest. The people of America who believed in the rectitude of Germany's aims have become disillusionized, and our entire nation now fully comprehends the issues involved in the war.

We were driven into the World War at the beginning of the fourth summer campaign. The advantage at the end of the three previous campaigns clearly rested with the Central Powers.

Germany retained her viselike grip upon Belgium, Luxemburg, and Northern France, the last including the great iron ore deposits of Lorraine upon which the industrial fabric of France is constructed. Rumania had been overrun. The Central Powers also held Poland, the larger part of Courland, and Lithuania.

On the other side, Italy had made some progress in Austria. The Russians had advanced in Northern Turkey and controlled the larger part of Armenia. Also, in Mesopotamia, the English had taken Bagdad. The colonies of Germany had been lost.

Through the command of the sea, the economic pressure of the Allies upon the Central Powers had steadily tightened; and, under this pressure, Germany began her ruthless submarine campaign which resulted in war upon us.

We entered the world-contest without being prepared and were not in a position to send an army to the front during the summer of 1917. However, our navy was ready; and we were able effectively to assist upon the sea in the fight against the submarine. Also we gave large material aid to the Allies. Further, being the chief source of supplies for the neutrals, we cut off the indirect importation of necessities to the Central Powers. In this way, we tightened the economic grip upon Germany.

From the outset, it has been realized that the war is to be won or lost upon the Western front. It was hoped that with our help the Allies would end the war

during 1917. The program was a combined Allied offensive upon all fronts. The superiority of men and guns, which to the year 1917 had remained with the Central Powers, was then upon the side of the Allies; and the campaign of that year was entered with confidence. In the West advances were made. Brilliant battles were won, among them Vimy Ridge. Then came the startling advance at Cambrai which raised our hopes high, but only to have them fade away; for, within a short time, the British were driven back nearly to their former lines.

Toward the end of 1917 it appeared that the western campaign of that year would be indecisive. To this disappointment were added the unhappy chapters of Italy and Russia.

Late in the year came the disastrous onslaught upon Italy. In a few days, she lost not only the Austrian territory she had gained, but a large area of Northern Italy. By tremendous effort, with the assistance of France and England, the Austro-Germans were held at the Piave, and the plains of Lombardy were saved. The full losses of the Italians we do not know, but the Central Powers claim to have captured 280,000 men, or many thousands more than the United States had in France at the beginning of this year.

To this calamity must be added the catastrophic collapse of Russia.

In the midst of our most hopeful period came the revolution in that country, which at first we welcomed, because it seemed an advance for democracy,—the last great nation but one joining the ranks of those who had overborn autocratic authority. At the outset things seemed to go well. The Duma was in charge; and at the head of the democracy of Russia was the able and experienced Prince Lvov; yet his name, so

well known a year ago, we have almost forgotten. Then came Kerensky; and upon him we depended to save his country. It seemed for a time that the trend toward disintegration would cease; but Kerensky was overthrown by the Bolsheviki; and we had at the head of the Russian government Lenine, a revolutionary red, and Trotsky, of whom we knew only as a soap-box orator of the East Side of New York, both absolutely without experience in any responsible position, private or public.

Russia well illustrates the danger to a people, long under oppression, freed by one stroke from autocratic rule. Learning that ancient authority can be overthrown, the people revolt against the newly constituted authority upon slight cause.

Freedom suddenly acquired by revolution, instead of slowly by evolution, is a most dangerous power. The successful democratic nations have gained self-restraint through generations and centuries of self-discipline.

A free people must recognize that the authority growing from themselves must be obeyed as implicitly as that of the autocrat claiming to rule by divine appointment.

The danger which many foresaw at the outset of the Russian revolution has been more than realized. Disorder and disintegration spread throughout the country. Finland declared her independence. The Ukraine did likewise. The Cossacks refused to accept the authority of Petrograd. Finally, the Russian army was disbanded; and the Central Powers forced from Lenine and Trotzky a degrading peace which gave Germany and Austria control of a row of great provinces from Finland to the Ukraine.

The Central Powers assisted Finland in gaining her independence; it is now proposed that there be imposed upon her a German monarch, and thus make Finland a dependency.

The independence of the Ukraine has been recognized by the Central Powers. However, the authorities in control of the country were driven from power by Germany, and a government approved by that country has been set up which places the region in the same position of dependence as Finland.

Thus, the Central Powers, at the present time, control vast provinces extending from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea,—Finland, Livonia, Esthonia, Courland, Poland, Lithuania, and the Ukraine. In addition three provinces extending from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea, inhabited by Armenians, are to be added to those people already subject to the Turk.

The complete collapse of Russia illustrates the awful consequences of an ignorant but well meaning people placing their confidence in two wildly irresponsible men.

As a final step in the East, a humiliating peace has been forced upon Rumania, under which she loses territory and accepts conditions which make Germany supreme in the economic development of that country. The Central Powers then proclaimed that a just peace had been made in the East by the might of their arms, and that now it was only necessary to secure a strong peace on the Western Front.

The resources of the conquered or controlled provinces are now available to the Central Powers. In this address these cannot be separately summarized; those of the Ukraine, as perhaps the most important, are briefly mentioned.

Until this war, the Ukraine, ordinarily called "Little Russia", was almost unknown to us; yet this province comprises 850,000 square kilometers, or more than one and one-half times the area of Germany. It contains 28,000,000 people, including several large manufacturing cities and the great commercial city of Odessa, on the Black Sea, the chief port of Russia, through which before the war went 70 per cent of all the exports of that country.

The agricultural wealth of the Ukraine is enormous. Of the entire area of the country, more than one-half is under cultivation. Here are nearly one-third of the farm lands of all Russia. In normal times, the province produced annually more than 16,000,000 tons of cereals and possessed vast herds of cattle.

The Ukraine is also the great mineral region of Russia. From it comes 60 per cent of the Russian output of iron ore—an annual production of more than 6,000,000 tons—one-sixth of the world's supply of manganese, and all the mercury produced in Russia. In the Ukraine is raised three-fourths of the coal mined in European and Asiatic Russia, and practically all of the anthracite. In consequence of these resources, the Ukraine is the great industrial region of Russia, the Pittsburg-Chicago district of that vast country.

To the east of the Ukraine, in the land of the Cossacks, and to the north are the other great wheat fields of Russia. The natural outlet for this vast wheat region is down the Volga and the Don to the Black Sea. Once there, the way is open by the Danube and by railroad to Austria and Germany.

While the other conquered provinces are not so extensive or so rich as the Ukraine, the resources of several of them, for instance, Poland and Courland, are vast.

Finally the area turned over to Turkey from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea greatly strengthens the Central Powers, for here is the petroleum of the Baku district, one of the most important in the world.

While for the year 1918, the resources obtained from these countries by the Central Powers may not be large, it is certain that, organized by Germany, vast supplies of both food and mineral products will be available from them in 1919. Not only so, but the man power will be utilized by the Central Powers, at least indirectly, by the production of agricultural and mineral commodities. Probably also the ruthless methods of the Central Powers, which stop at nothing and which completely disregard all international law, will impress men into their armies. This means that there will be added to the 146,500,000 of the Central Powers, those of the dependent territories of Russia, some 45,000,000 in number. Thus the total population subject to the Central Powers is not less than 190,000,000.

This was the situation three months ago, in the early spring of 1918. The collapse of Russia had in large measure released the armies of the Central Powers in the East; and the best divisions were transferred to the West. The superiority in man power passed from the Allies to the Central Powers. Then came the onslaught of the German hordes the latter part of March. The fifth army of England was destroyed; and it seemed for a time as if Germany's plan to end the war by overwhelming the armies of the West would be successful. But finally, after an advance almost to Amiens and Arras, the drive was halted, but not until the area gained by the Allies as the result of three years of bloody war had been lost.

Finally there came the terrific drive on Paris beginning the last week of May and continuing to the middle of June. The Germans pushed forward to the Marne and almost to Rheims in less than a week. They appear now to be halted. But doubtless, following a period of preparation, they will launch somewhere a third drive. This week the Austrian offensive in Italy has been launched with slight success. Almost at the outset it appears to be stopped.

The first drive came at a time when it seemed that the efforts of America were paralyzed. It looked as if there could not be found in the country a sufficient amount of wheat to meet the absolutely minimum essential demands of the Allies. It had just become known that the airplane service, of which so much was expected the first year, had added no planes to the fighting forces. Ships, instead of being launched in accordance with our hopes, had been produced most haltingly.

As already stated, the German drive has been halted. By vigorous search, throughout the United States, it appears that sufficient wheat will be obtained to feed the Allies until the new harvest, provided we continue our extreme economy until that time. The airplane service has been reorganized; and, while few American planes have reached the Front, there is now hope that this important arm of the service, organized for the first time under a sound policy, will go forward. Ships have begun to be launched in increasing numbers. One 5,500 ton steel ship has been turned over to the government complete in 37 days, and another 8,800 ton ship in seventy-eight days. It now looks as if, for this year, not the six million tons that we had hoped, but four million tons may be achieved, and that

the production will be so great in 1919 that lacking ships will no more be a source of anxiety. In the meantime, during the past three months, by concentrating upon the transportation of men, with the assistance of great numbers of ships furnished by the British, men from America, who to that time had gone forward slowly, have been sent to France by the hundreds of thousands; and the Secretary of War has announced that soon we shall have in that country 1,000,000 men.

If the crisis of the World War has been passed, as now seems possible, the greatest crisis in the history of civilization has been turned.

However we must appreciate that there is a gigantic task before us, which will demand that the United States act as a coordinated unit, exerting its utmost effort in every direction.

In all wars, material resources have played a large part, and especially agricultural resources; but this is the first great war in which the metallic resources of the world have taken a supreme place. It is true that Napoleon, an artillery officer, a century and a half ago, appreciated the importance of artillery; and he stated that the Lord was on the side of the general who had the heaviest guns. Since Napoleon's time, artillery has steadily played an increasing rôle.

But our own Civil War was not decided so much by heavier guns as by more numerous men and larger agricultural production. Indeed, to the very opening of the world war, no power except Germany had appreciated the importance of heavy artillery under modern conditions. Even France was relying mainly upon her light 75, which indeed is a superb weapon

in the open field, but which is helpless before the modern Troglodyte armies.

To destroy cement and steel fortifications and to tear to pieces earthworks requires numerous large calibre guns.

In wars preceding the present, rifle fire was the cause of about 70 per cent of the casualties. In this war the situation is reversed, and the 70 per cent is due to gun fire.

We now understand that, henceforth, land war is to be one of great machines of many kinds, including the heavy truck and the tank, of guns running up to those of 15 or even 20 inches in calibre. The heavy guns must number many thousands and the light guns many tens of thousands. The shells must be reckoned in hundreds of millions; indeed the demand for shells is insatiable.

Our resources and those of the Allies will be taxed to the utmost to supply the demand for guns and shells. The side that has the most numerous and the heaviest guns and can fire the most shells can kill more of the enemy than the other side; therefore, it is imperative that we have overwhelming superiority in guns and munitions. To dominance of gun fire must be added the supremacy of the air to locate men, works, and guns.

If this becomes a war of attrition, as seems probable, the side must finally win which can bring to bear the heaviest material resources; and in this respect, the United States stands unmatched among the nations of the world.

We produce much more coal than Great Britain, France, and Germany combined. For that fundamental metal, iron, we also produce more than these three countries together. We produce vastly more copper

than all the rest of the world. For petroleum we produce more than twice as much as the rest of the world. Our agricultural wealth is not approached by that of the Central Powers combined. Our railroad mileage for 100,000,000 people is 40,000 miles more than that of all Europe for 450,000,000 people.

Notwithstanding these enormous resources, we felt acutely this last winter the shortage of coal, and to a less extent a shortage of steel.

The food supplies of the Allies have been scanty and their shortage of coal and certain minerals acute.

But we must remember that every one of these difficulties we magnify, because close at hand; whereas of the far greater difficulties of the Central Powers we know little.

Sherman said of Grant that he was not better than some of the other northern generals in tactical capacity and strategy, but that he was unapproached in his constructive imagination which enabled him to appreciate the weaknesses of his opponents and therefore what they would be likely to do. His own difficulties and those of the Confederates were placed in proper perspective; and he steadily moved forward.

Further, a fundamental factor in the winning of a war is the morale of the opposing forces. Hundreds of thousands of selected youths from one hundred million people are bringing a new courage into the conflict; not a greater courage than that which has been exhibited by the French and British, for this is impossible, but the fresh courage possessed by these nations at the outset of the war. The hundreds of thousands are to become millions. This fresh courage of the new armies of the great Republic of the West cannot but have a highly inspiring influence upon the decimated

veterans of France, England, and Italy, who for the past four years have endured all the horrors of fighting an enemy unrestrained by any moral law. The fresh courage of the new divisions of America and its inspiring effect upon the men of the Allies cannot but have a depressing effect upon the German forces. Thus the entrance of the armies of America has a threefold influence in strengthening the morale of the forces fighting for Right.

We must now resolve that as a solidified nation, working with the Allies as one, we shall bring all our moral, man, and material resources to bear upon the task of driving the Central Powers from Belgium, Italy, and France, and compelling them to release the subject provinces of Russia.

This is indeed as grim and formidable task as has ever confronted a nation.

The Congress must cease partisan politics and enact the necessary legislation so that the President and his agents shall have adequate authority and sufficient funds.

In this country, where there is abundant and superabundant food for all, we must practice self-denial and eat as asked by the Food Administration, in order that we may furnish to the Allies essential concentrated foods, which they must have—wheat, rye, meat, fats, and sugar.

The farmers must exert themselves to the utmost to vastly increase the food of the country. Their exertions this year already promise well. The wheat crop is estimated at 930,000,000 bushels, and it may reach a billion bushels. Even the more moderate estimate is nearly three hundred million bushels more than last year. The rye will be increased by one-third, or from

a production of 60,000,000 to 80,000,000 bushels. It thus appears probable that at least to the harvest of 1919, we shall be able to furnish the necessary wheat and rye to the Allies besides having an ample amount for ourselves.

The operators of mines must organize their work so as to produce the greatest possible quantities of coal, steel, copper, lead, and zinc; and these metals must be distributed in the most effective way.

The manufacturing industries of the country must efficiently cooperate as asked by the government, for the production of war machines, guns, and munitions, in ever increasing quantities.

Ships must be constructed in ever increasing numbers. All unnecessary red tape must be eliminated. The highest business efficiency must be introduced.

Happily Congress has enacted laws which make the railroads of the country a unit. The task is now to add vastly to the equipment of the roads and to operate them to their fullest capacity.

In all this work, there will be required the combined intellectual effort and the patriotic cooperation of the mining, manufacturing, and business men of the country, the men who have been trained through many years in carrying on enterprises on a vaster scale than anywhere else in the world; and they must participate in this work as patriots, not as profiteers.

The wealth and industry of the country must cheerfully accept greatly increased income and excess profits taxes, for by such taxes only will it be possible for the government to obtain the necessary money to prosecute the war to the extreme of the country's power.

As self-denial is asked of the business men, likewise self-denial is asked upon the part of labor. Organized

labor must not work to produce the minimum output in eight hours, but to produce the maximum output. Strikes must be eliminated. Work must go on unceasingly. Whenever injustice is done by employers, the appeal of the employed is to the government labor board for rectification of the wrong. Such appeal, exercised in several instances, has had prompt response. Happily it may be said that for the most part the demands of patriotism to labor are now being fully met.

This must be a war of farmers, laborers, artisans, managers, engineers, business men, united as one against world autocracy.

Educational institutions, as all others, have as the supreme consideration service to the nation—how they can best advance the winning of the war. This has been the guiding principle of the University of Wisconsin since our country entered the gigantic struggle.

From the outset, it has been recognized that the regular work of the University is patriotic work of the highest importance and that the faculty must continue with full efficiency their instructional work, in order that we may furnish to the country a steady supply of highly trained young men and women. This imperative need can only be met by the higher educational institutions. However, so far as possible, the facilities of the University have been made available to the government for other needs. These principles, carried out consistently, are in harmony with the recently announced policy of the government.

While guided by these principles, it was also appreciated that members of the faculty, who have special qualifications for particular work, should answer the call of the government. A large proportion of the

faculty have thus responded, the greater number working at war problems in connection with their instructional work and in vacations; but also nearly two hundred have taken leave of absence and are giving their full energy to war work.

In this address, it is not feasible to summarize the war work of the members of the faculty. It comprises many lines of teaching, extension, administration, and research. Many members of the faculty have rendered most useful service, both to the state and to the nation. The results of certain lines of research will bring high honor to this institution.

Also, in accordance with the policy outlined, the students have been urged to remain at the University until trained for some particular service. For the majority of the men, this training has looked toward entering the officers' training schools or some special branch of the army or navy. When thus prepared, they have been urged to enter the fighting ranks. This educational policy has now been adopted by the War and Navy Departments.

A large number of men have already entered the service. To Commencement, 1918, of the students who were registered here in the years 1916–17 and 1917–18, 1,550 have entered the army and 382 the navy; in addition to these, 115 students have withdrawn for war work, in the Red Cross, in government occupations, in munition plants, in state service, and in the allied armies of England, Canada, and Italy,—a total of 2,047. Already ten have made the supreme sacrifice for their country. Two have been killed in action, two died of wounds received in France, one was killed on an aviation field in Texas, and five have died of disease.

Members of the Graduating Classes: Having come to the end of your academic careers, the question before each is what *you* can best do to assist in the supreme effort of the nation. Already of the men of the graduating class, who today are candidates for first degrees, 400 in number, 204, or more than half, have answered the question by entering the army or navy. They will today be awarded the special diploma of the University which contains the phrase, "*In his senior year, he entered military service in the Great War for the defense of democracy.*"

Other men who are graduating will also join the stream of those who have already entered the army or navy. For others, the command of the Country will be the more difficult one to continue their education in medicine, in chemistry, or in other subjects where there is even greater need for men than in the ranks of the fighting forces. This command you must patriotically obey.

Many of the young women are thinking, with envious eyes, of the opportunity of the men to serve at the front. Your patriotic ardor must find different outlets. Many of you will go into the Red Cross, into civilian relief work, in public campaigns, etc.; but also the woman's work of the world must be done; and it should be recognized that the women who continue this work also are performing a patriotic service. Finally, the duty will fall upon many, of filling the places in commerce, in mining, in industry, in administration, left vacant by the men.

If the full power of this country can be coordinated under wise constructive leadership, the war can have but one termination. The Teutonic powers will be overborn. But let us not minimize the effort.

Inspired by the righteousness of our cause, we must bring to bear vast quantities of food, multitudes of great ships and innumerable mighty engines of war, built of our abundant metals and driven by the energy of our unlimited supply of coal, all under the control of millions of our most select young men, highly trained for the work before them.

To do this will require, from all, the supremest sacrifices of which we are capable, thinking first of the future of this nation and of humanity rather than of ourselves.

If this sacrifice be made, we shall not fail; if it be not made, the Central Powers will win the war. This would mean that the evil doctrine that Might makes Right is established in this world. It would mean that moral law between nations has disappeared, and that the giant nation is free to prey upon her weaker neighbors. It would mean that the people of the World are to become, like the German peasant, the submissive, docile cattle of the war lords of Germany.

But the sacrifice will be made; it must be made, even if it costs us millions of dead and a debt of scores of billions of dollars. Right will become Might. The individual will continue to have free growth into the heavenly air above.

Without these things there can be no permanent peace in this world. Therefore, men and women of the graduating classes, highly resolve to exert to the utmost both your mental and physical energy, in order that you may do your full share in maintaining in this world a dominant moral civilization.

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